

The King is Dead: Long Live the Free Republic!

Tuesday, May 22, 2007

To: Mr. Kevin Martin

Federal Communications Commission Chair

Re: Net Neutrality

Dear Mr. Martin:

As a pair of politically aware citizens in the United States today, we cannot help but bear the repeated assault of the hackneyed rhetorical “what would the Founding Fathers do?” gambit. It’s misuse and overuse have rendered it nearly meaningless in meaningful and reasonable debate. Nearly. Their intentions for our New Republic are all we have to maintain their distinct and wildly successful political philosophy, and so I will require their help to demonstrate to you that “Net Neutrality” is not only essential to free speech, equal opportunity, and economic innovation in America, but that it is quintessentially American. But how could we estimate what the “Founding Fathers” thought about their own contemporary issues, much less ours? How can even a dedicated and persevering legal or political scholar justify his claims of a Constitutional interpretation’s consistency--or lack of it--with that standard?

Franklin’s “RevolutionNet” United the States

Because those great visionaries were able to share their mental and philosophical resources. They had relationships far and wide with each other, and used them to generate their Great Experiment. These renaissance men could only combine their visions, talents, strategies, and conclusions by utilizing the tools already established in the early colonies: our postal carriers to transport their letters, and the network of inter-colony postal and trade routes which, by royal order, were developed and maintained by the colonies themselves. But how could brilliant men investigate, experiment with, and finally express their fledgling concepts without interference from their monolithic, domineering government? How could they enforce their self-claimed privilege of Free Speech, despite the random searches and arbitrary violations of privacy common to the king’s loyalty police? The only way they could: they employed veiled references and secret marks to hide their private thoughts and feelings from a dictator whom they felt did not deserve to read their minds and hearts in secrecy. They encrypted their communications in order to preserve not just their liberties, but by their success in doing so, created and codified our liberties today. Speedy, open access to information and the ability to share it with others allowed America to exist.

Benjamin Franklin worked hard to develop these interconnected regional routes in a

comprehensive communication and logistical system better than even the ancient Roman model: he developed, essentially, the Colonial Internet. He could only have been influenced by his unique opportunity to learn from the enlightened souls who loaned their rare, expensive books, at no cost, from their private libraries to a middle-class printer's apprentice who couldn't possibly repay them in money or influence. Dale Carnegie openly credited his awesome industrial career to his opportunity to teach himself all he knew in America's free public libraries--established by a grateful Ben Franklin, and nonexistent in his poverty-stricken homeland of Scotland.

Millions before and since have tacitly acknowledged America's unrivaled self-empowering opportunities by demonstrating their frequent business, political, and community victories. They would have remained impossible dreams under their native countries' oppressions, whether they be violent politics or soul-crushing poverty. Since the first secret letter was mailed, years before the first shot of the Revolutionary War, American Power has become synonymous with Freedom of Speech. This right allows all other rights: the right to think freely, to compare our ideas, and to condone or condemn the ideas of others is the source of all of our nation's great powers intellectually and military (the Army's ARPA developed it in the first place, but quickly discovered the tremendous value in linking our universities into one great conversation, allowing thinkers to debate solutions to our challenges in hours, not months), socially and politically (The House and Senate both have very active Web sites, informing their constituents transparently and instantly), and fundamentally, as 70% of all U.S. homes have Internet access, and millions of our citizens with the greatest need may access the power of information, discussion, and self-expression through their local libraries, in their public schools, and at their workplaces.

Mr. Martin, our strength is in our diversity: of need, of opinion, and of vision. The FCC must ensure that broadband providers do not block, interfere with, or discriminate against any lawful Internet traffic based on its ownership, source, or destination. Separate us, and we lose our "nation-hood" and dissociate into ignorance, apathy, and pessimism. Allow us to speak, to read, to share, and to engage as a nation, and The Sleeping Giant, which has shaken the world since his birth with that first letter between Founding Fathers, will rise again.

"United We Stand, Divided We Fall."

--Benjamin Franklin